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# THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN FOLK-LORE.

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## THE FOLK-LORE OF THE ESKIMO.

THE Eskimo inhabit the whole Arctic coast of America and many islands of the Arctic Archipelago. Their habitat extends on the Atlantic side from East Greenland to southern Labrador, and thence westward to Bering Strait. A few colonies are even located on the Asiatic shore of Bering Strait. Their culture throughout this vast area is remarkably uniform. A certain amount of differentiation may be observed in the region west of the Mackenzie River, where the neighboring Indian tribes, and probably also the tribes of the adjoining parts of Asia, have exerted some influence upon the Eskimo, whose physical type in this region somewhat approaches that of the neighboring Indian tribes. The foreign influences find expression particularly in a greater complexity of social life,—in a higher development of decorative art, in the occurrence of a few inventions unknown to the eastern Eskimo (such as pottery and the use of tobacco), and in religious observances, beliefs, and current tales not found in more eastern districts.

Unfortunately the folk-lore of the tribes west of the Mackenzie River is only imperfectly known, so that we cannot form a very clear idea of its character. Judging, however, from the fact that quite a number of Eskimo tales which are known east of Hudson Bay are known to the Chukchee of northeastern Siberia,<sup>1</sup> we are justified in assuming that these tales must also be known—or have been known—to the Alaskan Eskimo.

The present state of our knowledge of the Eskimo warrants us in assuming that the most typical forms of Eskimo culture are found east of the Mackenzie River, so that we may be allowed to base our description of Eskimo folk-lore on material collected in that area. A clear insight into the main characteristics of the folk-lore of the western Eskimo cannot be obtained at present, owing to the scantiness of the available material.

<sup>1</sup> Waldemar Bogoras, "The Folk-Lore of Northeastern Asia as compared with that of Northwestern America" (*American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. iv. pp. 577-683).

The collections of eastern Eskimo folk-lore consist principally of H. Rink's Greenland Series,<sup>1</sup> G. Holm's tales from East Greenland,<sup>2</sup> A. L. Kroeber's account of Smith Sound traditions,<sup>3</sup> F. Boas's records from Baffin Land and Hudson Bay,<sup>4</sup> and Lucien M. Turner's collections from Ungava Bay.<sup>5</sup> From the region of the Mackenzie River and farther west we have to consider principally the tales collected on the Mackenzie River by E. Petitot,<sup>6</sup> and those recorded by E. W. Nelson,<sup>7</sup> Francis Barnum,<sup>8</sup> and John Murdoch<sup>9</sup> in Alaska.

The most striking feature of Eskimo folk-lore is its thoroughly human character. With the exception of a number of trifling tales and of a small number of longer tales, the events which form the subject of their traditions occur in human society as it exists now. There is no clear concept of a mythical age during which animals were men capable of assuming animal qualities by putting on their blankets, and consequently there is no well-defined series of creation or transformation legends. The world has always been as it is now; and in the few stories in which the origin of some animals and of natural phenomena is related, it is rarely clearly implied that these did not exist before.

I will first of all discuss the group of tales that may be interpreted as creation legends. Most important among these is the legend of the "Old Woman." It seems that all the Eskimo tribes believe that a female deity resides at the bottom of the sea; and that she furnishes, and at times withholds, the supply of sea-mammals, the chief source of subsistence of the Eskimo. The Central Eskimo say that at one time she had been a woman who escaped in her father's boat from

<sup>1</sup> H. Rink, *Eskimoiske Eventyr og Sagn*, Copenhagen, 1866 (second part), 1871; *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo*, London, 1875 (translation of part of the contents of the Danish edition; unless otherwise stated, this translation is quoted).

<sup>2</sup> G. Holm, "Sagn og Fortaellinger fra Angmagsalik" (*Meddeleser om Grenland*, vol. x.).

<sup>3</sup> A. L. Kroeber, "Tales of the Smith Sound Eskimo" (*Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xii. 1899, pp. 166 *et seq.*).

<sup>4</sup> F. Boas, "The Central Eskimo" (*Sixth Annual Report, Bureau of Ethnology*, Washington, 1888, pp. 399-669; quoted Boas, i.); F. Boas, "The Eskimo of Baffin Land and Hudson Bay" (*Bulletin American Museum of Natural History*, vol. xv. New York, 1901, pp. 1-370; quoted Boas, ii.).

<sup>5</sup> Lucien M. Turner, "Ethnology of the Ungava District, Hudson Bay Territory" (*Eleventh Annual Report, Bureau of Ethnology*, Washington, 1894, pp. 159 *et seq.*).

<sup>6</sup> E. Petitot, *Traditions indiennes du Canada nord-ouest*, Paris, 1886.

<sup>7</sup> E. W. Nelson, "The Eskimo about Bering Strait" (*Eighteenth Annual Report, Bureau of Ethnology*, Washington, 1899, pp. 1-518).

<sup>8</sup> Francis Barnum, *Grammatical Fundamentals of the Innuit Language*, Boston, 1901, 384 pp.

<sup>9</sup> John Murdoch, "A Few Legendary Fragments from the Point Barrow Eskimos" (*American Naturalist*, 1886, pp. 593-599).

her bird-husband, and who, on being pursued by her husband, was thrown overboard by her father. When she clung to the gunwale of the boat, her father chopped off her finger-joints one after another. These were transformed into seals, ground-seals, and whales (in the Alaska version, into salmon, seals, walrus, and the metacarpals into whales<sup>1</sup>). After this had happened, she was taken to the lower world, of which she became the ruler. In South Greenland, where this tale also occurs,<sup>2</sup> the "Old Woman" plays an important part in the beliefs and customs of the people, since she is believed to be the protectress of sea-mammals. Evidently the tale is known to all the tribes from Greenland westward to Alaska, since fragments have been recorded at many places.

In another tale the origin of the walrus and of the caribou are accounted for. It is said that they were created by an old woman who transformed parts of her clothing into these animals. The caribou was given tusks, while the walrus received antlers. With these they killed the hunters, and for this reason a change was made by which the walrus received tusks, and the caribou antlers.<sup>3</sup>

The different races of man, real and fabulous, are considered the descendants of a woman who married a dog, by whom she had many children who had the form of dogs. Later on they were sent in different directions by their mother; and some became the ancestors of the Eskimo, others those of the Whites, while still others became the ancestors of the Indians and of a number of fabulous tribes.<sup>4</sup>

In a legend which is common to all the Eskimo tribes,<sup>5</sup> it is told that Sun and Moon were brother and sister. Every night the sister was visited by a young man who made love to her. In order to ascertain the identity of her lover, she secretly blackened his back with soot while embracing him. Thus she discovered that her own brother was her lover. She ran away, carrying a lighted stick for trimming the lamps, and was pursued by her brother. Both were wafted up to the sky, where she became the sun, and he became the moon.<sup>6</sup>

It would seem that in the beginning man was immortal. According to Egede, a dispute arose between two men regarding the advantages of having man die. Since that time man is mortal.<sup>7</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> Boas, ii. p. 359. I give in the following footnotes references to this book, in which the versions from various regions have been collected.

<sup>2</sup> H. Rink, *The Eskimo Tribes*, Copenhagen, 1891, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Boas, ii. p. 361.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 359.

<sup>5</sup> This story is also widely known among Indian tribes. See James Mooney in *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, Washington, 1900, pp. 256, 441.

<sup>6</sup> Boas, ii. p. 359.

<sup>7</sup> According to Egede. See Rink, p. 41; also David Cranz, *Historie von Groenland*, Barby, 1765, p. 262.

legend is not quite certain. If correct it must be related to the tradition of the origin of day and night told on the west coast of Hudson Bay,<sup>1</sup> and to the numerous analogous Indian tales.<sup>2</sup>

There are quite a number of insignificant stories of hunters, of people quarrelling, etc., who were wafted up to the sky and became constellations.<sup>3</sup> Thus an old man who was being teased by a boy tried to catch him, and both rose up to the sky, where they became stars. A number of bear-hunters, their sledge, and the bear which they were pursuing, rose to the sky and became the constellation Orion.<sup>4</sup>

Similar to these are a number of trifling stories telling of the origin of certain animals, and in which peculiarities of these animals are explained. Examples of these are the story of the Owl and the Raven, in which it is told that the Raven makes a spotted dress for the Owl, while the latter, in a fit of anger, pours the contents of a lamp over the Raven, making him black;<sup>5</sup> and the story of the grandmother who kept on walking along the beach while her grandson was drifting out to sea until the soles of her boots turned up and she became a loon.<sup>6</sup> All these stories are brief, almost of the character of fables or anecdotes.

There are a few creation stories, in which the creation of a certain animal appears as an incident of a purely human story. Here belongs the tradition of the origin of the narwhal. A boy, wishing to take revenge on his mother, who had maltreated him while he was blind, pushed her into the sea, where she was transformed into a narwhal, her topknot becoming its tusk.<sup>7</sup> Similar in general character to this is the tradition of the girl who was maltreated by her parents, and who was gradually transformed into a black bear.<sup>8</sup>

Here may also be mentioned the tale explaining how thunder and lightning are produced by two women who live by themselves; and the story that in olden times children were not born, but found in the snow, and that the new order of things originated when a child climbed into the womb of a woman along her shoe-strings, which had become unfastened.

It will be noticed that in none of these creation legends is there any inner connection between the whole trend of the story and the incident of creation. It is not clearly stated, and in many of these

<sup>1</sup> Boas, ii. p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> G. B. Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, pp. 138, 272; W. Matthews, *Navaho Legends*, p. 77; A. L. Kroeber, "Cheyenne Tales" (*Journ. Am. Folk-Lore*, vol. xiii. p. 161); C. G. Du Bois, "Mythology of the Diegueños" (*Ibid.* vol. xiv. p. 183); James Mooney, "Myths of the Cherokee" (*Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, p. 436).

<sup>3</sup> Boas, ii. p. 174.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 360.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 220, 320.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 218.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 168.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 171.

stories it is not even necessarily implied, that the animals created did not exist before the creation recorded in the story. The animals created are rather individuals than the first of their species. The general conditions of life supposed to prevail at the time of the story are the same as the conditions of life at the present time. This is exemplified in the story of the origin of the sea-mammals, in which it is in no way stated that the game animals were created to supply the needs of man. So far as the story shows, these animals might have existed before they were created from the finger-joints of the "Old Woman." Neither does it appear from the tale of the origin of the sun and moon that there was no daylight before this event.

The complete absence of the idea that any of these transformations or creations were made for the benefit of man during a mythological period, and that these events changed the general aspect of the world, distinguishes Eskimo mythology from most Indian mythologies. Almost all of these have the conception of a mythological period, and of a series of events by means of which conditions as we know them now were established. It is true that in Indian legends also the story implies natural and social surroundings similar to those in which the Indians live, and that this sometimes leads to contradictions of which the Indians do not become conscious, the fact being forgotten that a number of things necessary for life had not yet been created. Nevertheless, the fundamental idea in Indian legends is, on the whole, the relation of the thing created to human life, which point of view does not appear at all in the myths of the Eskimo.

The absence of the idea that during the mythological period animals had human form, that the earth was inhabited by monsters, and that man did not possess all the arts which made him master of animals and plants, is closely connected with the striking scarcity of animal tales. While the bulk of Indian myths from almost all parts of our continent treat of the feats of animals, such stories are rare among the Eskimo. The creation legends referred to before can hardly be classed in this group, because the animals do not appear as actors possessed of human qualities — excepting, perhaps, the story of the woman who married the dog. Here belongs, however, the legend of the man who married a goose,<sup>1</sup> which story, in its general character, is closely related to the swan-maiden legends of the Old World. A man surprises a number of girls bathing in a pond. He takes away their feather garments and marries one of their number, who later on resumes bird shape by placing feathers between her fingers, and flies back to the land of the birds, which is situated beyond the confines of our world, on the other side of the hole in the sky.

<sup>1</sup> Boas, ii. p. 360. References to the following stories will be found at the same place.

The incident in the story of the origin of the narwhal, where the goose takes a blind boy to a lake and dives with him, thus restoring his eyesight, also belongs here. Furthermore, we must count here the widespread Eskimo story of the girls who married, the one a whale, the other an eagle, and who were rescued by their relatives; that of the woman who invited the animals to marry her daughter, but declined the offers of all until finally the foxes came and were admitted to the hut, where they were killed; and the tale of the man who married the fox, which, on taking off its skin, became a woman, with whom he lived until she was driven away by his remark that she smelled like a fox. Besides these, hardly any animal stories are found east of Alaska, excepting a very considerable number of trifling fables. These show a gradual transition to the more complex animal stories such as were mentioned before. An instance of this kind is the Greenland story of the man who was invited in first by the Raven, then by the Gull, and who was given such kinds of food as these birds eat. This story occurs in a much more trifling form in Baffin Land.<sup>1</sup>

It is very remarkable that almost all the important animal stories are common to the Indian tribes and to the Eskimo. The dog-mother tradition is known over a large part of North America, along the North Pacific coast as far south as Oregon, and on the Plains in the Mackenzie Basin, and on the Missouri and Upper Mississippi. The second legend of the series, that of the man who married a goose, occurs among the Chukchee, and was found by Dr. John R. Swanton among the Haida of Queen Charlotte Islands. At present its occurrence in British Columbia seems isolated, but probably it will be found among the tribes of southern Alaska and among the Athapaskan, since many stories appear to be common to this area. The whole first part of the story of the origin of the narwhal, which contains the incident of the boy whose eyesight is restored by a goose, is common to the Eskimo, to the Athapaskan of the Mackenzie area, and to the tribes of the central coast of British Columbia.<sup>2</sup> I do not know the story of the girls who married the whale and the eagle from any tribe outside of the Eskimo and Chukchee; while the next one, the legend of the woman who called one animal after another to marry her daughter, reminds us forcibly of the Tsimshian story of Gauo's daughter.<sup>3</sup> The first part of the tale of the man who married the fox is identical with analogous tales of the Algonquin and Athapaskan of the north.<sup>4</sup> It is the story of the faithless wife who was surprised by her husband when visiting her lover, a water-monster.

<sup>1</sup> Rink, p. 451; Boas, ii. p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> See Boas, ii. p. 366.

<sup>3</sup> See F. Boas, *Tsimshian Texts*, Washington, 1902, p. 221; *Indianische Sagen von der Nordpazifischen Küste Amerikas*, p. 281.

<sup>4</sup> Rink, p. 143; Boas, ii. p. 222; Petitot, *l. c.* p. 407.

The second part, in which it is told that the man married a fox who had taken off its skin, also finds its counterpart in a group of tales of similar character that belong to the Athapascans.<sup>1</sup>

Thus it will be seen that every single pure animal story of the Eskimo, with the exception of one, finds its counterpart in Indian folk-lore. Their total number is six. It is very probable that the number of such tales in Alaska is much greater, since we know from Nelson's and Barnum's records that many of the animal tales of the Indians of the North Pacific coast and of the Athapascans have been introduced among them. A few additional animal tales have also been found on the west coast of Hudson Bay, but these are also of Indian origin throughout, being evidently borrowed comparatively recently by the Eskimo from their neighbors; otherwise they would have spread more widely among the Eskimo.

I think it is justifiable to infer from these facts that the animal myth proper was originally foreign to Eskimo folk-lore. The concept that animals, during a mythic age, were human beings who, on putting on their garments, became animals, and whose actions were primarily human, does not seem to have formed a fundamental part of their concepts.

This does not exclude, however, the clearly developed notion that, even at the present time, animals may become the protectors of men, to whom they will give instruction; and that man, by means of magic, may assume the form of animals. We also find that animals are conceived of as human beings; who, however, always retain animal characteristics in all their actions. A good example of this concept is the tale of the transmigrations of the soul of a woman,<sup>2</sup> in which the manner of life of various animals is described. The soul of the woman, upon entering an animal, converses with other individuals of the same species as though they were human beings, and their actions are like those of human beings. Another story of a similar kind describes a family wintering in a village of bears.<sup>3</sup> Stories of girls marrying monsters<sup>4</sup> may also be mentioned as examples of the anthropomorphic concept of animals.

The characteristic point in all these stories seems to be that the actions of the anthropomorphized animals are strictly confined to anthropomorphic interpretations of animal activities; as, for instance, in the tale of the transmigration of the soul of the woman, to explanations of how the walrus dives and how the wolves run, and in the tale of the bear, to remarks on the large size and voracity of the bear people. There do not seem to be any stories of undoubted Eskimo

<sup>1</sup> Boas, "Traditions of the Ts'ets'ä'ut" (*Journ. Am. Folk-Lore*, vol. ix. pp. 263, 265); Petitot, *l. c.*, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Boas, ii. pp. 232, 321.

<sup>3</sup> Rink, pp. 177 *et seq*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 186 *et seq.*



origin in which animals appear really as actors in complex adventures, as they do in the coyote, rabbit, or raven stories of the Indians, or in the fox stories of the Japanese, or in other animal stories of the Old World, in which the peculiarities of the animal determine only the general character of its human representative, while the scope of the adventures is entirely outside the range of animal activities, the stories being based on a variety of incidents that might happen in human society.

I consider this restriction of the field of animal tales one of the fundamental features of Eskimo folk-lore, and am inclined to believe the few tales of different character as foreign to their ancient culture.

The great mass of Eskimo folk-lore are hero-tales in which the supernatural plays a more or less important rôle. In this respect Eskimo folk-lore resembles that of Siberian tribes; although the adventures are, on the whole, of a quite distinct character, which is determined by the general culture of the Eskimo.

Many of these stories appear to us so trifling that we might be inclined to consider them as quite recent, and as tales of incidents from the life of an individual not long since dead, distorted by the imagination of the story-teller. That this assumption is not tenable is shown by the wide distribution of some of these stories. A very striking example of this kind is the story of Iavaranak, which is known in Greenland, Cumberland Sound, and in Labrador.<sup>1</sup> It tells of a girl of a tribe of inlanders who lived among the Eskimo, and who betrayed them to her own tribesmen. One day, while the Eskimo men were all absent, she led her friends to the Eskimo village, where all the women and children were killed. She returned inland with her friends, but eventually was killed by a party that had gone out to take revenge. Still more remarkable is the tale of Sikuliarsiujuitsok,<sup>2</sup> which occurs both in Labrador and Cumberland Sound. It is told that a very tall man, who was so heavy that he did not dare to hunt on new ice, was much hated because he took away the game from the villagers. One day he was induced to sleep in a very small snow-house, in which he lay doubled up, and allowed his limbs to be tied in order to facilitate his keeping quiet in this awkward position. Then he was killed. A third story of this character is that of Aklauijak,<sup>3</sup> which is also known both in Labrador and in Cumberland Sound. It is the story of a man whose wife was abducted by his brothers. He frightened them away by showing his great strength. While sitting in his kayak, he seized two reindeer by the antlers and drowned them. Even the names of the heroes are the same in these

<sup>1</sup> Rink, pp. 174, 175; Boas, ii. p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 449; Boas, ii. p. 292.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 449; Boas, ii. p. 270.

tales. Since intercourse between the regions where these tales were collected is very slight, — in fact, ceased several centuries ago, — we must conclude that even these trifling stories are old. In fact, their great similarity arouses the suspicion that many of the apparently trifling tales of war and hunting, of feats of shamans and of starvation, may be quite old. The conservatism of the Eskimo in retaining such trifling stories is very remarkable, but is quite in accord with the conservatism of their language, in which the names of animals that occur in southern latitudes are retained in the far north, where these animals are absent, and where the names, therefore, receive an altered meaning. Thus the names *agdlaq* ("black bear"), *sigssik* ("squirrel"), *umingmak* ("musk-ox"), are known on the west coast of Baffin Bay, although none of these animals occurs in that area. The *amaroq* ("wolf") and the *avigna* ("lemming"), which are not found in West Greenland, are there considered as monsters. In the same way the *adlet*, the name for "Indians," occurs in Greenland and Baffin Land as a designation of a fabulous inland tribe.

The same conservatism manifests itself in the faithful retention of historical facts in the folk-lore of the people. In South Greenland the memory of the contests between the Eskimo and the Norsemen which took place between 1379 and 1450 survives.<sup>1</sup> In southern Baffin Land the visits of Frobisher in 1576–1578 are still remembered.<sup>2</sup>

The fabulous tribes described in Eskimo folk-lore are very numerous. Those most frequently mentioned are the *tornit*, the *adlet* or *erqigdlit*, and the dwarfs.<sup>3</sup> The *tornit* are described as a race of great strength and stature, but rather awkward, who at an early period inhabited the country jointly with the Eskimo, but who were ultimately driven out. On the whole, they are good-natured, and the stories tell mostly of friendly visits, although hostile contests also occur.<sup>4</sup> The *adlet* or *erqigdlit* are described as having the lower part of the body like that of a dog, while the upper part is like that of man. They are ferocious and fleet of foot, and encounters between them and Eskimo visitors always terminate in a fierce battle, which generally ends with the death of the *adlet*. In some cases the visitors are saved by the kindness of a single individual.<sup>5</sup> The dwarfs are of enormous strength; they carry short spears, which never miss their aim.<sup>6</sup> They sometimes visit the villages. There

<sup>1</sup> Rink, pp. 308 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Hall, *Life with the Esquimaux*, London, 1865, p. 247.

<sup>3</sup> Rink, pp. 46 *et seq.*

<sup>4</sup> Boas, ii. pp. 209 *et seq.*, 315; Rink, pp. 47, 217, 438.

<sup>5</sup> Rink, p. 116; Boas, ii. pp. 203 *et seq.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 48; Boas, ii. pp. 200 *et seq.*, 316.

are tales of intermarriages of all these fabulous people with the Eskimo.

Besides these fabulous tribes, giants and cannibals are often mentioned in the tales. There are giants<sup>1</sup> of such size that they scoop up hunters and their boats in the hollow of their hands. Their boots are so large that a man can hide in the eyelet through which the shoelacing is drawn. In tales of marriages between giants and man the incongruity of their sizes forms the subject of coarse jokes.

The tales of monsters relate of hunters who vanquish them after fierce combats<sup>2</sup> and of girls married to monsters.<sup>3</sup>

The tales of quarrels and wars give us a clear insight into the passions that move Eskimo society. The overbearance of five brothers or cousins, the middle one being the most atrocious character, or simply of a number of men, their tyranny over a whole village, and their hostility against the suitor of their sister, form a favorite theme.<sup>4</sup> We find also many tales of a powerful man who holds the whole village in terror,<sup>5</sup> and who is finally slain. Often those who attack the overbearing brothers or the master of the village are introduced as visitors from a distant place to which they have fled or which is their home. They are first hospitably treated, and afterwards the customary wrestling-match — which is a test between the residents and the new-comers — is arranged,<sup>6</sup> and in this match the quarrel is fought out.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes the theme of the tale is the maltreatment of a poor orphan boy by the whole village community, who are eventually punished for their malice.<sup>8</sup> In many cases the poor boy is described as living with his grandmother or with some other poor old woman, or with an old couple. While he is growing up, he secretly trains his body to acquire strength, and is admonished by those who take care of him not to forget his enemies.<sup>9</sup> Tales of poor maltreated children who later on become very powerful are a frequent and apparently a favorite subject of story-tellers.

A very peculiar trait of Eskimo tales is the sudden springing up of hatred between men who had been the best of friends, which results in treacherous attempts on life.<sup>10</sup> The causes for this sudden change from love to hatred are often most trifling. In one of the stories quoted here the reason given is the failure of one of the friends to come back from the interior in season to take his share of the seals caught by his friend. In the second story the reason is that one man shoots the dog of another on being requested to do so. In the third no reason whatever is given.

<sup>1</sup> Boas, ii. p. 360; Rink, p. 430.

<sup>2</sup> Rink, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 346, 351, 362; Boas, ii. p. 288.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 135; Boas, ii. pp. 283, 290.

<sup>6</sup> Boas, ii. p. 116.

<sup>7</sup> Rink, pp. 206, 211. <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 202, 339, 347, 364.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 119, 215, 333.

No less curious is the boldness of visits of men to their enemies, whom they intend to kill, and among whom they settle down and live until finally the struggle begins.<sup>1</sup>

The reasons for quarrels are generally disputes over property rights, jealousies, tale-bearing of old women, and often resentment against tyranny. Many stories begin with an incident of this kind, and end with the tale of revenge. In a few cases the reason for a person becoming a murderer is his despair over the loss of a relative.<sup>2</sup>

Tales of shamans are quite numerous. Some tell of their visits to other worlds, while others illustrate their supernatural powers. These stories presuppose a knowledge of the fundamental mythical concepts of the Eskimo, who believe in a number of worlds above and below to which the spirits of the dead go. The mistress of the lower world is the "Old Woman," the mother of sea-mammals, whom she withholds whenever she is offended by man. Therefore many tales tell of the shaman's visit to her abode, whither he goes to propitiate her. His body is tied with thongs; he invokes his guardian spirits, and his soul departs. The difficulties of approach to her are described in great detail in the Greenland traditions.<sup>3</sup> It is worthy of notice that some of the dangers the shaman has to pass on his way to her are described also by the Central Eskimo as found on the trail to the country of the birds beyond the hole in the sky.<sup>4</sup> The Greenland tradition mentions that the dwellings of the happy dead, an abyss, and a boiling kettle have to be passed, and that terrible monsters guard her house, while in the entrance of her house is an abyss that must be crossed on the edge of a knife. The dangers on the trail to the land beyond the sky are the boiling kettle, a large burning lamp, the guardian monsters, two rocks which strike together and open again, and a pelvis bone. The principal office of the shaman, after reaching the "Old Woman," is to free her of the unconfessed abortions—the greatest sin in the eyes of the Eskimo—which infest her and cause her anger.<sup>5</sup>

Other shaman's tales relate of a visit to the Moon,<sup>6</sup> who is described as a man who lives in a house, in the annex of which the Sun resides. The visitor has to witness the antics of an old woman without laughing, otherwise she will cut out his entrails and give them to her dogs to eat.

The shamans perform their supernatural feats by the help of their guardian spirits, who are mostly animals, but also the spirits of the dead or those residing in certain localities or in inanimate objects.

<sup>1</sup> Rink, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 215; Boas, ii. p. 299.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Boas, ii. p. 337.

<sup>5</sup> Rink, p. 40; Boas, ii. pp. 120 *et seq.*

<sup>6</sup> Boas, vol. ii. p. 359.

The guardian spirit appears on the summons of the shaman, and takes him away to distant countries<sup>1</sup> or assists him against his enemies.<sup>2</sup> Amulets consisting of pieces of skin of animals enable the wearers to assume the form of the animal.<sup>3</sup> Shamans are able to change their sex,<sup>4</sup> and to frighten to death their enemies by tearing the skin off their faces and by other means.<sup>5</sup> Many tales also deal with witchcraft and with shamans overcoming the wiles of witches.<sup>6</sup> Witchcraft is practised by means of spells or by means of bringing the food of an enemy into contact with a corpse, which results in making the person who eats it a raving maniac.<sup>7</sup> Spiders and insects are also used for purposes of witchcraft.

The sexual element, which plays a very prominent part in the tales of the Indians of the Pacific coast, is present only to a very slight degree in the Eskimo tales. Among the whole mass of Eskimo traditions collected and retold without omission of passages that in our state of society would be deemed improper, very few obscene incidents are found.

All the ideas, the most important of which I have briefly described here, are welded into the hero-tales of the Eskimo. The tales themselves may be roughly grouped into those describing visits to fabulous tribes and encounters with monsters, tales of quarrels and wars, and those of shamanism and witchcraft. Of course, all these elements appear often intimately interwoven; but still the stories may readily be grouped with one or another of these types.

The first group, the tales of visits to fabulous tribes, embraces many legends of the adventures of hunters who travelled all over the world. The best known of these is perhaps the story of Kiviuk,<sup>8</sup> who went out in his kayak, and, after passing many dangerous obstructions, reached a coast, where he fell in with an old witch, who killed her visitors with her sharp tail, by sitting on them. After escaping from her by covering his chest with a flat stone, he came to two women who lived by themselves, and whom he assisted in obtaining fish. Finally he travelled home and found his son grown up. Characteristic of Greenland are the numerous traditions of visits to a country beyond the sea, and of adventures there. These do not seem to be so common among the central tribes, although among them similar tales are not missing.<sup>9</sup> An example of these is the tale of two sisters who were carried away by the ice to the land beyond

<sup>1</sup> Rink, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Boas, ii. p. 184.

<sup>3</sup> Rink, pp. 7, 16, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Boas, ii. pp. 248, 249.

<sup>5</sup> Rink, p. 52; Boas, ii. pp. 249, 255.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 157; Boas, ii. p. 182; Kroeber, *l. c.*, p. 177. See also Rink, p. 222; Holm, p. 48.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 169, 248, 270; Boas, ii. p. 191.

the sea, where they subsisted for some time on salmon and seals which they caught. They were discovered by two men whom they married. They gave birth to two daughters, whereupon the husband of the one threatened to kill his wife if she should give birth to another daughter. Therefore they made their escape back to their own country across the ice. Their brother, induced by their tales of the abundance of game in the country across the sea, set out on a visit, giving his boat three coverings, which he cut off in succession when they became wet. He caught much game, and killed the men who had threatened his sisters by causing them to drink water mixed with caribou-hair taken from the stocking of a dead person. By this means the enemies were transformed into caribou, which he shot.<sup>1</sup>

The most famous among the tales of cannibals is that of the man who fattened his wives and ate them, until the last one made good her escape and reached her brothers, who killed the cannibal.<sup>2</sup>

Among all these hero-tales very few, if any, stories, or even elements of stories, are found which are common to the Eskimo and to their Indian neighbors, while some of these tales are quite similar to those of the Chukchee and even of the Koryak, whose culture has been directly influenced by that of the Eskimo. We may, therefore, consider them the most characteristic part of the Eskimo folk-tales. They reflect with remarkable faithfulness the social conditions and customs of the people. They give, on the whole, the impression of a lack of imaginative power. I indicated before that the few animal tales of the Eskimo are largely the common property of the Indian tribes of the Mackenzie Basin and of the Eskimo. Although a few of them — such as the story of the man who recovered his eyesight — have been found as far east as Greenland, the greater number of such stories are found on the coasts of Hudson Bay, where the Eskimos are neighbors of the Athapascans, and we have seen that they are probably originally foreign to the Eskimo. Nevertheless they have come to be among the most important and most popular tales of the Eskimo tribes.

*Franz Boas.*

<sup>1</sup> Rink, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Boas, ii. p. 360.